

Harbour seal

Harbour seal is one of the two most common seals in the North Sea (Ducrotoy et al., 2000). Harbour seal is also the most common species of seal in the Wadden Sea (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2004). According to Planque et al. (2021) and Pint et al. (2023), seals are opportunistic feeders that eat more than just fish. Squid (*Loligo vulgaris*) and Blue mussels (*Mytilus edulis*) are examples of these species other than fish (Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023).



History/ Population trends

Humans have extensively hunted seals for centuries (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2018). This, combined with other reasons such as disease and pollution, caused the population of seals to decline (Brasseur et al., 2018). They reached the point that the population became critically low, which caused the different countries to set a ban on seal hunting in 1977 (Brasseur et al., 2018). However, Harbour seal had to deal with two viral epidemics before they were able to improve their population size (Brasseur et al., 2018). The population of Harbour seals in the Wadden Sea has slowly recovered from around 3500 individuals to an estimate of 33.300 individuals (Brasseur et al., 2018). They now have the largest population of the two seal species (Brasseur et al., 2018).

Miscellaneous

- Harbour seals have their pups in June or July and their pups can be seen swimming with their mothers a few hours after birth (University of St. Andrews, n.d.).
- Harbour seals have an average diving time of about 4 minutes, with a maximum recorded diving time of 18 minutes (Thompson & Fedak, 2001).
- Harbour seal males have, on average, a lesser blubber thickness than females (Siebert et al., 2022).

Diet

- Sandeel (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2004; Hall et al., 1998; Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023)
- Flatfish (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2004; Hall et al., 1998; Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023)
- Cod (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2004; Hall et al., 1998; Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023)
- Whiting (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2004; Hall et al., 1998; Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023)
- Sprat (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2004; Hall et al., 1998; Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023)
- Herring (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2004; Hall et al., 1998; Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023)
- Small Fish (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2004; Hall et al., 1998; Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023)
- Cephalopods (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2004; Hall et al., 1998; Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023)
- Crustaceans (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2004; Hall et al., 1998; Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023)
- Other detritivores (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2004; Hall et al., 1998; Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023)
- Mussels (Aarts et al., 2019; Brasseur et al., 2004; Hall et al., 1998; Planque et al., 2021; Pint et al., 2023)

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